

John Gathin

admitted March 31st 1819

John P. [unclear]

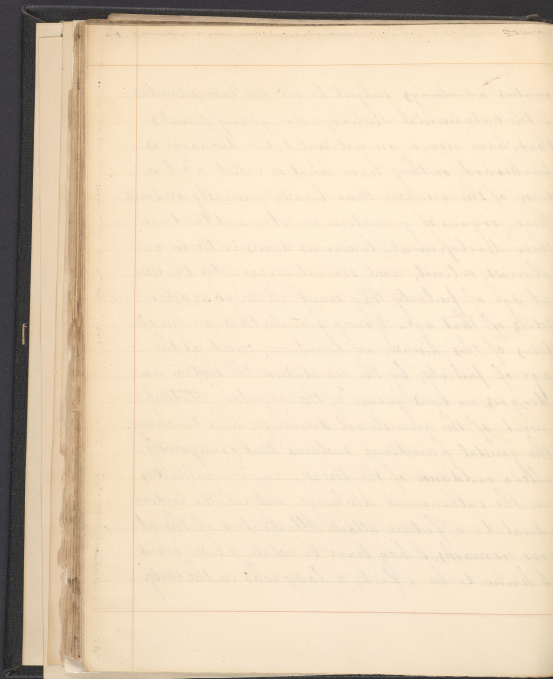
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Asthma

The word asthma, is derived from the Greek term, *ασμα* and signifies a difficulty of breathing. It was applied by the Greeks, to that kind of difficult respiration, with which people, who run, or take violent exercise are affected. Asthma continued long, in its original meaning to embrace every species of dyspnoea or difficult respiration: but by more modern nosologists, it is confined to a particular kind of this affection. The most usual division of asthma, has been into dry or spasmodic, and humoral; how far this division is correct, I am not able to determine, but I am inclined to believe, that humoral is nothing more than the spasmodic, attacking patients advanced in life; or in whom, the spasmodic by the frequency of its attacks, has produced a state of debility. And moreover, I am induced to think, that they both have the same proximate cause; and the only difference, that exists between them, is as to their effects, at least

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I shall confine my description, to the spasmodic form of this disease. It is very often a hereditary disease, and attacks all ages, sexes and temperaments. It has been described as seldom coming on, sooner than the age of Puberty; but the infantile age, is by no means exempt from it; Having seen in a family, in which this disease prevailed hereditarily, three instances, sooner than that period. In the patients that I saw, they were all of lively imaginations, quick apprehensions, versatile dispositions, and rather approached towards the sanguine temperament. Patients labouring under asthmatic predispositions, are liable to have a paroxysm brought on, by all the exciting causes to be mentioned hereafter, at any time; but more particularly, during Spring and autumn. The disease generally increases in the frequency of its attacks, the violence of its symptoms, and is attended, with febrile symptoms, during that period, called the Dog days. Female asth-

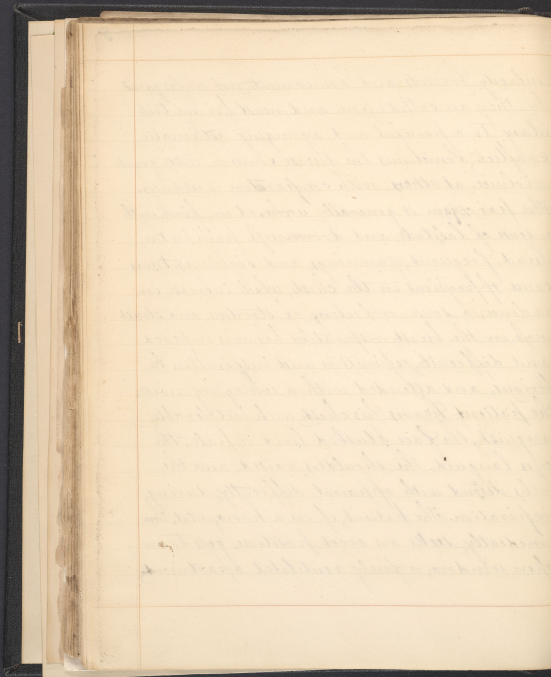
matics are always subject to all the irregularities
 of the catamenial discharge. In young females
 that have never menstruated; the discharge is
 backward, or they have what is called a reten-
 tion of the menses; their breasts generally are small
 their organs of generation are slow and tardy in
 their development; lascivious desires in them are
 almost extinct; and several years after the usu-
 al age of puberty, they want all the character-
 istics of that age. Young females that are the vic-
 tims of this disease; are sometimes cured at the
 age of puberty; by the revolution the system un-
 dergoes, in consequence of the regular establish-
 ment of the menstrual discharge; and the change
 the genital functions sustains. But consequently,
 after a riddance of the disease, any irregularities
 in the catamenial discharge, subject the indivi-
 dual to a future attack. Illustrative of the ab-
 ove remarks, I beg leave to relate a case; which
 I knew to be a fact; a lady who in the early



part of her life had been afflicted with asthma; about the fourteenth year of her age, she was relieved; and continued to enjoy uninterrupted good health, and free from any asthmatic symptoms, for several years; but toward the fortieth year, suffering some disturbance of the menstrual discharge, she was again attacked with asthma, and ever since, has continued to have regular asthmatic paroxysms. Now X
 far a diseased state of menstruation is connected with asthma, as a cause, I will not presume to say; but such is the fact; that it is so uniformly linked with it, in females, that it claims our very particular attention. Asthma most frequently comes on in the evening; sometimes before but most frequently after sleep; however it may come on in the day; but this is very rare. Those who are subject to this disease, are always admonished by certain, and infallible precursory symptoms, of an approaching attack. Amid much

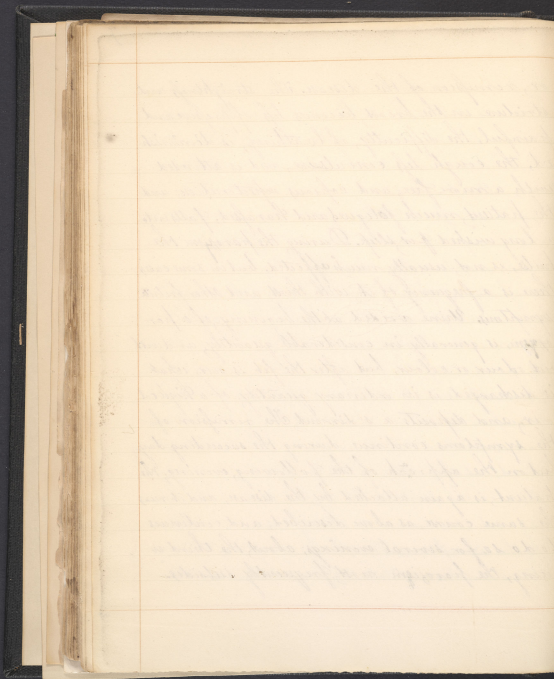
* either as cause or effect

hilarity, friends and amusement, not unfrequently, they are called upon; and must become tributary to a painful and agonizing asthmatic conflict. Sometimes the disease comes on, with great violence, at others, with comparative mildness. The paroxysm is generally ushered in, first, with a sense of lassitude and drowsiness; pain in the head, frequent yawning, and sighing; then come oppressions in the chest, which increase in violence; a sense or feeling of stricture and tightness in the breast; respiration becomes impeded and difficult; expiration and inspiration laborious, and attended with a wheezing noise; the patient heaves his chest with intolerable anguish, the face flushed livid or pale, the eyes languid, the shoulders raised, and the ribs descend with apparent difficulty, during expiration. The patient, if in a horizontal, immediately seeks an erect position; gets to an open window, or freely ventilated apartment,



The patient wishes to be alone, irascible and fretful,
 does not like to be interrogated, and if he speaks
 it is with apparent pain and difficulty. He loathes
 food, sour eructations, and other dyspeptic symp-
 toms attend. In consequence of pulmonary irrita-
 tion; either from ^{an} engorged condition of the lungs
 or an impeded circulation through them, nature
 endeavours to relieve herself, by calling to her aid,
 the assistance of the intercostal, and other muscles,
 subservient to respiration; which are sympathetically
 thrown into violent, and convulsive contractions, there-
 by producing the convulsive cough, observed in this
 disease. The cough at first is attended with little or
 no expectoration; or whatever is coughed up, is miser-
 able, and in violent cases, it is ^{sometimes} streaked with
 blood; at this stage, sometimes vomiting comes
 on, and the contents of the stomach are thrown
 up; and this occasions a comparative mitigation
 of the symptoms. The above symptoms continuing
 for some time; there is an evident abatement

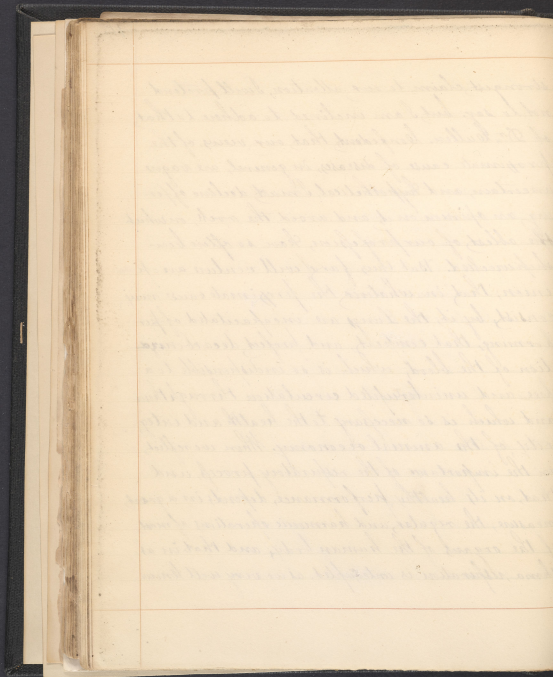
or remission of the disease. The straightness and stricture in the breast becomes less oppressive and painful, the difficulty of breathing is diminished; the cough less convulsive, and is attended with a more free, and copious expectoration; and the patient much fatigued and harassed; falls into a long wished for sleep. During the paroxysm the pulse, is not usually much affected; but in some cases there is a frequency of it, with thirst, and other febrile symptoms. Urine voided at the beginning of a paroxysm, is generally in considerable quantity, and without odour or colour; but after the fit is over, what is discharged, is in ordinary quantity, of a high colour, and deposits a sediment. The remission of the symptoms continue during the succeeding day, but on the approach of the following evening, the patient is again attacked by the disease, and it runs the same course, as above described; and continues to do so, for several evenings; about the third evening, the paroxysm most frequently subsides.



The length of time between the intervals of a paroxysm differs considerably; sometimes returning once, twice, three, or four weeks, and sometimes the intervals are longer or shorter. It sometimes returns at different periods pretty constantly, and at others, with so much irregularity, as scarcely to be deserving of the name; (periodical,) which has been attached to it. The remote predisposing cause of Spasmodic asthma, is most frequently, hereditary or constitutional. The exciting causes, are various and diversified; as, sudden vicissitudes of weather, from hot, to cold; from a heavier, to a lighter atmosphere, external, ^{heat} or cold too long applied, exposure to night, or damp air, obstructed perspiration by determining a too great a quantity of blood, to the pulmonary organs; violent passions or emotions of the mind, as anger, joy, excessive laughter &c. The most frequent of the exciting causes, are violent exercise, as running, dancing &c. or what ever raises the temperature of the body, and suddenly exposes it, to cold. Hence we

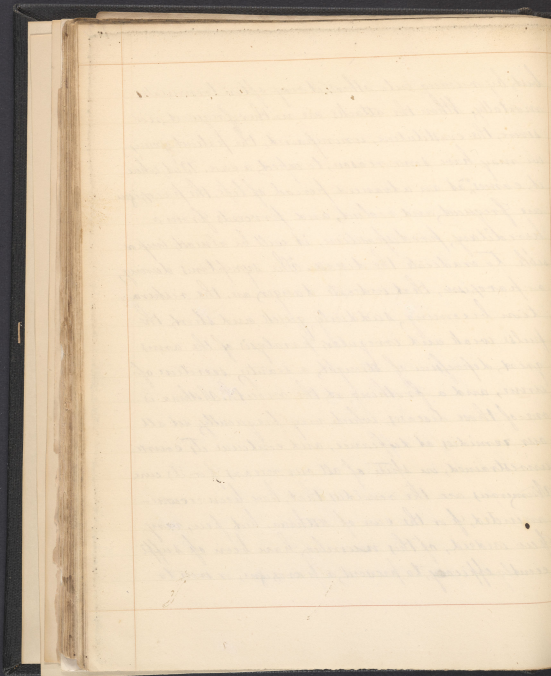
see few asthmatics, returning from balls, parties or places of amusement, without being attacked with a paroxysm. Except in eating, drinking, or improper food are among the exciting cause; also disagreeable odours, irritations, from smoke, dust, and other subtle particles floating in the atmosphere. Not a little diversity ^{of opinion} has existed, as regards the immediate or proximate cause of asthma. Dr Cullen, and most others, supposed, the proximate cause of the disease to be a permanent or spasmodic constriction of the muscular fibres of the bronchiae; which not only prevents their being so dilated, as to admit of a free and full inspiration, but also give them a rigidity, which interferes, with a free and full expiration. This doctrine has been disputed by Boer; who in a very ingenious work, on this disease, offers it as his opinion; that an irritation seated in the air cavities, arising either from effusion of serum, or from an aerial acrimony is the proximate cause of Convulsive asthma. Which of these opinions have the

strongest claim, to our attention, I will pretend not to say; but I am inclined to adhere to that of Dr Cullen. Confident, that our views, of the proximate cause of diseases, in general, are vague uncertain, and hypothetical, I must decline offering an opinion on it; and avoid the rock, on which the ablest of our profession, have so often been shipwrecked. But thus far I will venture an opinion; that in whatever the proximate cause may consist, by it, the Lungs are incapacitated of performing, that complete, and perfect decarbonization of the blood, which is so indispensable to a free and uninterrupted circulation through them and which is so necessary to the health and integrity of the animal economy. When we reflect on the importance of the respiratory process, and that, on its healthy performance, depends in a great measure, the regular and harmonious operations of most of the organs of the human body; and that in asthma, respiration is interrupted, as we very well know.

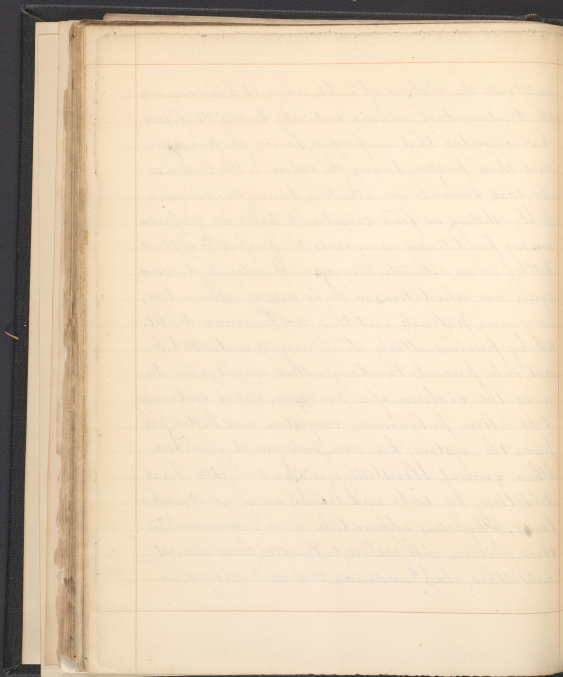


we are, a priori, led to expect an interruption in some of the other functions of the body, and of those, no one is more affected than the digestive; and hence we see nausea, flatulence, sour eructations, costiveness, and other dyspeptic symptoms, which constitute so prominently a feature, in this disease. Dissections of persons, who have died of this disease, have unveiled to us, but little or nothing of its proximate cause, they have shown to us, chiefly, the effects and ravages of the disease and left us, with but little information as to its nature. The terminations of Asthma; (if not in health, which are not frequently the case,) are either by effusions in the chest, producing hydrothorax, by a rupture of some of the pulmonary vessels, which finally end in pulmonary consumption or by an aneurismatic enlargement of the aorta or other large blood vessels. Asthma, though, from the violence of its attacks, would lead us, to apprehend much danger, is seldom of itself a fatal disease;

but, by running into others, it very often terminates mortally. When the attacks are neither frequent, nor severe, the constitution, unimpaired, the patient young, we may have some reason, to expect, a cure. But, when it comes, at an advanced period of life, the paroxysm are frequent, and violent, and proceeds from a hereditary predisposition, it will be almost, impossible to eradicate the disease. The symptoms during a paroxysm, that indicate danger, are, the respiration becoming suddenly quick and short, the pulse weak and irregular, paralysis of the arms great, depression of strength, a scanty secretion of urine, and a frothing at the mouth. Asthma is one of those diseases, which very frequently set all our remedies at defiance, and continue its course unrestrained, in spite of all our means for its cure. Numerous are the remedies that, have been recommended, for the cure of asthma, but few, very few indeed, of this number, have been of sufficiently efficacy, to prevent a paroxysm, or even to



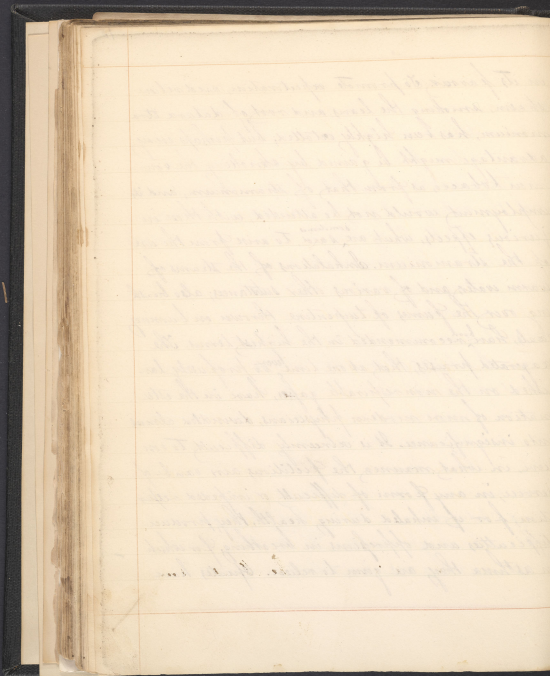
mitigate the violence of a fit, when, it has occurred. The treatment of asthma naturally divides itself, into those remedies, that, are proper, during the paroxysm, and those proper, during the interval. The first remedy that demands our attention, during the paroxysm is bloodletting; we find considerable difference of opinion among practitioners, as regards, the propriety of bloodletting, in an asthmatic paroxysm. It certainly does not equal our expectations, in every case of asthma; but, in young patients, and those not too much debilitated by previous attacks, its efficacy is undoubted. It not only prevents the danger that might arise during the violence of a paroxysm; but it certainly does relieve pulmonary congestion, and better prepares the system, for our subsequent remedies. Where general bloodletting is inadmissible, local depletion, by cups and leeches are of great importance. Physicians appear to be more unanimous, in their opinions, with respect, to Emetics, than almost any other class of medicines, that are employed in



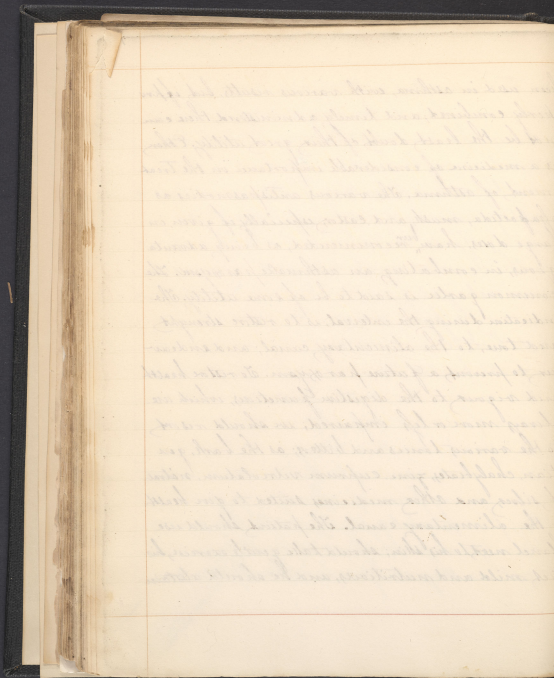
The treatment of asthma; and they are no doubt rem-
 edies of singular utility, if properly employed. Their
 administration should, whenever necessary be pursued
 by venesection. The emetic most generally selected is
 the Ipecacuanha, but whether it has any superiority
 over the antimonial preparations or not, admits of con-
 siderable doubt. Purgatives in asthma, as in most other
 pulmonary affections are not greatly demanded, but
 that the bowels should be kept in a soluble state is
 of the greatest importance; and for this purpose
 calomel, given in small and repeated doses, is admir-
 ably well adapted. It is at this time that the various
 expectorant medicines should be employed; in some
 cases the more lenient medicines of this class will be de-
 manded, as nauseating doses of emetic remedies;
 and in others, the more stimulating expectorants as
 gum ammoniac, Squills in powder, or variously com-
 bined. A decoction of the root of the radix senikae
 has been in high repute. The digitalis has been em-
 ployed, and there are not wanting strong attestations

The history of nations, and the progress of
the human mind, is a subject of great interest
and importance. It is a subject which has
attracted the attention of philosophers and
historians for many centuries. The study of
history is not only a study of the past, but
also a study of the present and the future.
It is a study which helps us to understand
the human condition and the human mind.
It is a study which helps us to see the
causes of the great events of the world
and the progress of the human race.
It is a study which helps us to see the
importance of the individual and the
importance of the community. It is a study
which helps us to see the value of the
human mind and the value of the human
spirit. It is a study which helps us to see
the meaning of life and the meaning of
death. It is a study which helps us to see
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in its passour, to promote expectoration, and relieve
 spasm, smoking the leaves and root of datura stra-
 monium, has been highly extolled; but perhaps every
 advantage might be gained by smoking the com-
 mon tobacco, as from that of stramonium, and its
 employment would not be attended, with those in-
 jurious effects, which are ^{sometimes} said, to arise from the use
 of the stramonium. Inhalations of the steams of
 warm water, and of various other substances; also breath-
 ing over the fumes of turpentine thrown on burning
 coals, have ^{been} recommended in the highest terms. The
 exaggerated praises, that, at one time, ^{were} profusely lav-
 -ished on the non-respirable gases, have in the sti-
 mulation of more modern physicians, dwindled almost
 into insignificance. It is extremely difficult to con-
 cieve, in what manner, the fictitious air can be of
 service, in any form of difficult or impeded respi-
 ration; for if inhaled during health, they produce
 difficulties and oppressions in breathing, for which
 in asthma they are given to relieve. Opium has

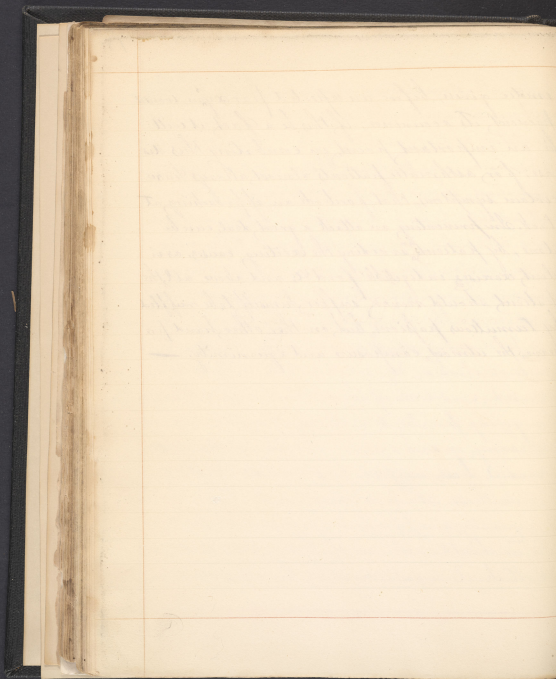


been used in asthma, with various results, but, if pro-
 perly combined, and timely administered, there can
 not be the least doubt of their great utility. Ether
 is a medicine of considerable importance in the treat-
 ment of asthma. The various antispasmodics as
 asafoetida, musk, and castor, especially if given in
 large doses, have ^{been} recommended, as being advanta-
 geous, in combating an asthmatic paroxysm. The
 common garlic is said to be of some utility. The
 indication during the interval, is to restore strength
 and tone, to the alimentary canal; and endeavor
 to prevent a future paroxysm. To restore health
 and vigour to the digestive functions, which are
 always more or less impaired; we should resort
 to the various tonics and bitters; as the bark, qui-
 nian, chalybeates, zinc, cuprum vitriolatum, nitrate
 of silver, and other medicines suited to give health
 to the alimentary canal. The patient should use
 flannel next to his skin; should take gentle exercise, his
 diet mild and nutritive, and he should abstain



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from all stimulating drinks. Cold bathing bathing
has been recommended, during the interval, but of
the utility of this practice, I will not pretend to say.
Ipsus, seasons, and perpetual blisters has been advised.
The patient should select, that place of residence
best adapted to his peculiarities of habit. We find
some asthmatics, enjoy health, best, in cities, others
in the country, some in elevated and dry, others in
low and humid situations. A circumstance that al-
most invariably attends, female asthmatics, which claims
our particular attention, and which has been too
much overlooked, by writers on this subject is a
diseased condition of their menstrual discharge.
In young females, it is almost always backward in
appearing; in such cases, we should resort to those
remedies, best adapted, to promote its flow
and in those, who have ~~never~~ menstruated, there
is generally a suppression or, some irregularity,
and ^{here} we should make use of those means suited, to
establish its regularity. It has been said that an

emetic given, before an expected paroxysm, would prevent its occurrence; if this be a fact, it will be an important point, in combating this disease; for asthmatic patients almost always have certain symptoms, that forebode an approaching attack. In preventing an attack a great deal, can be done, by patients ⁱⁿ avoiding the exciting causes, as violent exercise, indigestible food &c; and above all, the patient should never suffer himself to be ruffled by tumultuous passions, but on the other hand preserve, the utmost composure and equanimity.



1870
The following is a list of the
names of the persons who
were present at the
meeting of the
Board of Directors
of the
City of New York
on the 1st day of
January 1870.

